**Weekly Game Analysis**

**Week 6 - Sunny**

Constraint: Any

Prompt: Describe how your game produces two or more different types of pleasure. Reference specific design decisions that produce them.

A game I really enjoyed playing was Candy Box. It is a game featuring ASCII art, which means all of its graphics are produced using type and characters. Two of the main pleasures of playing Candy Box that made it such an addicting and fun experience were the pleasures of discovery and achievement. Candy Box is unique in it’s simplicity. I really can’t think of a game with a more straightforward design, except maybe paper/pencil games. When you first start a game of Candy Box, the only thing you see on the screen is a candy count that increases by 1 candy per second. There is only one option for you, which is “Eat all the candies.” Once you get 10 candies, then a second option appears to “Throw 10 candies on the ground.” The beginning may require some patience, but as your candy numbers increase, more options appear in the game. This element of waiting to unlock certain components of the game, or completing tasks in order to see other parts of a map, was a crucial reason why I wanted to keep playing this game. I found pleasure in discovering what other things I could do in the game, what other areas I could explore. Not being able to see what was to come next, or even the end goal of the game was, enabled me to discovery through my own means. For example, when I first got the map, it was not obvious exactly what parts of it I could access, so I had to hover over random areas of the map to see if I missed any areas that were clickable. I would always get really excited when I realized there was an area on the map I hadn’t realized was clickable.

The element of discovery in this game goes hand-in-hand with the pleasure of achievement. Because achievement unlocked new options for me in the game, it became a constant goal to defeat the next monster, to solve the next riddle, to get the next weapon. Many other games have a similar model to Candy Box, in that achievement is necessary in order to move forward in the game. However, in other games there is more strategy and skill involved, which, if I am not an experienced player, maybe become discouraged after a few failed attempts. Especially for me, I get discouraged very easily when I can’t get past a difficult level. With Candy Box, I never felt that way because failing to defeat a monster didn’t seem like such a big deal. I’d just wait to heal and then go back and try again. Maybe it was the lack of graphical detail that made me feel less emotional or annoyed when I “failed.” Or maybe the motivation to achieve came from wanting to discover more aspects of the game instead of working towards an end goal, which caused me to not be discouraged. Although the pleasure of discovery and the pleasure of achievement are very much intertwined, they both played a huge part in my enjoyment of the game.

**Week 7 - Ara**

Constraint: A game with a strong narrative element

Prompt: Choose a narrative element in your game. What do you believe it was intended to achieve, and why? Was it effective? Why or why not?

From my experience playing The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim so far, the primary narrative type, according to Jenkins’ writing, is embedded narratives. There is one goal the players can work towards. There may be side quests to help level up, advance in skills, or gain items, but the end goal is to defeat Alduin, the dragon terrorizing the people of Skyrim.

Skyrim has a clear, main objective, but players may choose to pursue their personal goals and objectives within the game. The game allows for players to have endless possibilities of game styles: reaching the highest level, decorating personal homes, collecting rare items, killing as many dragons as possible, and so forth. The game designers allow for numerous creative explorations, plays, and experiences of the game. Skyrim is successful in terms of appealing to many different types of crowds, but unsuccessful looking from a purely narrative lens. From a narrative perspective only, the game does not provide enough constraints to keep players focused on the goal. It is an open world, allowing players to go wherever, whenever, and to fight whomever, whenever. Personally, I am a player who needs a clear direction and a definite objective to achieve. I want to finish the game, and the story, but the open world setup hinders my desire to finish the story; the infinite amount of choices in every instance of the game makes it difficult to find the most direct path to accomplishing the main objective of the game.

The elements within Skyrim, such as NPCs and tutorial guidelines, point to the central goal of defeating the dragon. It relates to Koster’s “Narrative is not a game mechanic” article of problem, black box, and feedback diagram. It is a repeating pattern of conflict (problem), action by the player (black box), and story (feedback) which reminds the players of the main objective. However, the narrative element is not strong enough. Although RPGs are dependent on narratives, Skyrim does not necessarily need the narrative element to have a similar game play experience. It is a nice “extra” game element in Skyrim, but it might have been a stronger game design if it was either a more creative, open world game like Minecraft, or a more narrative-dependent game with a clear path and more constraints. Of course, I acknowledge the success of the game as it is right now, and the balance of open world and narrative makes Skyrim a unique game. Analyzing it from a purely game design perspective, however, I must conclude that Skyrim’s narrative element is not efficient enough to have a strong narrative experience within the game.

**Week 8 - Angela**

Constraint: A game you expect to dislike

Prompt: Why did you think you would dislike this game? Were you right or wrong? What aspect or aspects of the game contributed to this?

The game that I believe I will dislike is Candy Crush. I think the hype started about 3 years ago when suddenly all of my friends who had smartphones were playing it. I never understood the point and therefore never hopped onto that bandwagon. Here are a few of the reasons as to why I think I would dislike Candy Crush. The first and foremost is that the game seems repetitive and mindless. The strategy fundamentally doesn’t change from level to level and within each level you are doing the same moves over and over again. Perhaps this is a gamer type preference, but from level to level I would want to be continuously challenged in a more strategic way, rather than bumping up the amount of points that you have to gain. Two example that I can think of that have the same static goal per level but do a better job at challenging the player in a more meaningful way are Cut the Rope and World of Goo. In Cut the Rope, the goal is the same and is simple - get the candy to the frog. However, they add constraints, you must think about fundamental laws of physics, use the objects they’ve placed in the environment for you, etc. In world of Goo, you also need to understand how physics comes into play with your structures, the environment is different, etc.

After giving the game a try and playing for a few hours spread out over a few days, I discovered that I was correct in my original assumption, and indeed I do not enjoy Candy Crush. Perhaps if I gave it more time I would “like” it in the sense that I would get so sucked in that I had to continue to play. And this, actually, is another big aspect of why I dislike the game. I realized while playing that what is interesting is that I like the game Bejeweled, but not Candy Crush. The games are very similar and after thinking about it, I realized that the difference is that bejeweled doesn't have levels so it's sort of a waiting-for-the-bus time killer game that I can play loosely whenever I had a few moments. Bejeweled is something I can put down and not think about until the next time that I’m bored whereas the designers of candy crush have built into the game a need for the player to advance levels and attain goals one after another. Players get wholly consumed within the game and are able to play for extensive amounts of time to continue feeling the achievement and satisfaction of the next level like it was an addiction. This is not the type of game that I like to get started because of its extreme absorbing power and low strategy. Those two combined create a meaningless game in my gamer preferences and opinions.

There are a few key aspects of the game that contributed to my dislike. The first is that the screens do not change from level to level. While you can choose levels from a “map” view of all the levels that makes it feel like you are traveling through another world, when the level itself opens up, the interface is more or less exactly the same. Given the idea of the game I can understand that there is only so much it can change, but this did contribute to my feelings of monotony. To bring back the World of Goo example, you can also view all the levels as a path/journey in another world. However, what’s different is that within the actual level, the environment is always new and interesting. While the game strategy is fundamentally the same, just as it is in Candy Crush, there are new animations to see, background to play in, and obstacles to work around. It makes each level look and feel like a new level, whereas in Candy Crush they all look basically the same. The second aspect was mentioned above, and that is the fact that the game is designed to have you sucked in. This aspect brings in a new element of stress and urgency where people begin playing the game JUST to advance to the next level rather than out of pure enjoyment. Then the game becomes a waste of time in hindsight, rather than an accomplishment. Perhaps I would also be sucked into the game after a few more plays, but for now, these are the reasons why I dislike Candy Crush.

**Week 9 - Ben**

Constraint: Any

Prompt: Choose a value you think is being expressed by your game. What mechanical or aesthetic decisions express that value? Are there any aspects of the game that undermine that commitment?

Journey is a game, an experience, and a piece of art that values the beauty of interpretation, reflection, wonder, companionship, and aesthetics. Journey’s expressions emerge out of a few subtle game design mechanics and the negative space left between the lines they have drawn.

Journey is the antithesis of a goal oriented game. The game holds itself together by crafting an experience so fundamentally expressive, natural, and meditative that simply experiencing the path to the end becomes goal, not the end itself. The end of the game is quite simply a void of white nothingness: once it is all said and done, there’s literally nothing achieved nor rewards to collect. So it becomes clear that the narrative and the lack of a defined goals are game design decisions that express a sense of wanderlust and “in the moment” enjoyment of life. By designing a game that intentionally places players in a world without intentions draws out a beautiful narrative that flows with the beat of natural life.

The game’s aesthetics, player movement, and the qualities of the interaction between you and your companion all support this notion of wonder. Other player seamlessly appear during your Journey, without notice or explanation. When you first see another figure in the distance, skating along the sparkling sand dunes, you can’t help but become overwhelmed with wonder. Its magical and intriguing everytime a new companion joins you on your Journey. The design decision to heavily restrict the ways you interact with your companion actually enhance your connection with the other person as you explore ways to communicate and share the experience together. Your interaction restricted to only making one noise, but your relationships endless.

The aesthetics help surface the values of interpretation as they make subtle hints to meaning in the narrative. The simply illustrated mountains in the distance, your ill-defined destination, the vague murals, and the simplistic models and color choice throughout the game all support this goal. To avoid getting into the interpretation myself, I’ll simply state that the game uses the forms in their environment to drive a story and experience that is so open to interpretation that every person can find meaning in it. Journey has an amazing way of building meaning out of the lack of something. In this case, the lack of text, words to communicate, and detailed visuals actually ends up allowing people to transcend what is actually there to something they find truly meaningful.

The movement in Journey by itself demonstrates how the game values aesthetics and feelings. Imagine gliding through the sky, supported by the uplifting powers of magical cloth. Experiencing how your character dances flying through the sky draws the player into the moment, grounding them in this wonderful fantasy world. The care and attention the game designers gave to something as simple a movement demonstrates how they want players to play their game. They don’t want people to use movement as a tool to achieve a goal or solve a puzzle - they want people to simply enjoy moving, like dancers or people who do yoga. Such a well crafted experience enhances the reflective qualities of the game, because its overall very calming and uplifting tactile, emotional, and visual experience.

Unfortunately Journey is still a game and there are aspects of the experience that are very tailored to that context. There’s a wonderful mechanic where you can sit down and meditate with your companion, which only adds to the values the game is trying to express. Unfortunately, after a for a certain amount of time you get an achievement that makes a noise and overlays on the screen.

**Week 6 - Lisa**

Constraint: Any

Prompt: Describe how your game produces two or more different types of pleasure. Reference specific design decisions that produce them.

Game: Portal

One type of pleasure in Portal is an adrenaline rush (which is arguably more fear, but I’d call it pleasurable fear). This type of pleasure is engineered by design decisions such as forcing the player to do things that may injure/kill the player and/or that are timed. For example, chamber 16 requires the player to disarm/destroy the various turrets. While most of this level does not require you to jump out into the line of fire, it is at times inevitable and forces you into a situation where you may die. For me, the pressure of death forced me to act carefully, and I often hid behind corners for long periods of time out of fear. But then when I finally came out of ‘hiding’, it gave me an adrenaline rush, not knowing if I would come out of this action alive. At the time it was an unpleasant, terrifying experience (and I actually spent hours agonizing over what to do because I was so scared), but afterwards, I’d look back on what I’d done and feel a real sense of victory.

What also helped to engineer that pleasure was that the game specifically set up moments of quiet between the action of fighting turrets. This kept the adrenaline rush/fear of playing the level to short bursts, followed by stretches of peacefulness where I could catch my breath, prepare for more, and look back on the small feat I’d just done and feel good about succeeding. I think if it had been one long stretch of action, it would have felt insurmountable, but the actual set-up gave me small challenge ‘chunks’ followed by a chance to feel the pleasure of finishing them.

A second type of pleasure is the sense of reward/accomplishment from completing a challenging puzzle. Puzzles, unlike challenges such as the turret, have no time limit, but can be incredibly complex, requiring an intricate series of Portals. The pleasure derived from this comes primarily from the skill required to figure out what to do, although some parts of the puzzles do require some timing (i.e. platforms rising out of the acid water for a limited amount of time). This can, of course, be done in small chunks as with the turret chamber, but can be taken at any pace due to the untimed, low-stakes nature of the puzzles. Instead, what makes the puzzles challenging is how they are set up and the careful amount of clues given to the player on how to solve them. For example, in chamber 15, certain information is subtly given to the player, while other information is left unspoken. There is a point at which there are two rooms side by side, each with a barrier that does not allow portals to carry over, but an energy ball must be portaled from one room to the next. The player is already familiar with the properties of the barriers from an earlier portion in the chamber, but the exact method of how to place portals is not explained, as that is the challenge left to the player. However, the energy ball leaves char marks on the walls wherever it hits, giving the player an easy visual cue to figure out where to throw up a portal to teleport it, and in the “end” room, there is a soft red light over the spot that will lead the energy ball straight to the goal. In these ways, the game gently guides the player while still providing a challenge.

**Week 6 - Jeel**

Constraint: Any

Prompt: Describe how your game produces two or more different types of pleasure. Reference specific design decisions that produce them.

Angry Birds is a game I have fun playing every time. It involves killing pigs by flinging birds at them using a slingshot. The different types of pleasure that I experience while playing Angry Birds include Role-Playing and Advancement. Angry Birds is aesthetically very appealing and there are various different kinds of birds that you get to play with. At different stages in the game, new birds are introduced. Each bird is designed to have different capabilities which makes each of them unique and gives them their own strengths and weaknesses.The red birds fly normally. The small green birds can split into three birds while flying. The black birds can blast if touched during flight. The yellow birds accelerate when touched during flight. The white birds can drop eggs when touched during flight and the green birds act as boomerangs. Even though the player doesn’t get a choice to choose which bird he can play with on his turn, but the very fact that every level has a different combination of birds available introduces this anxiousness and excitement before beginning the level and this is what I find pleasurable. Having different birds keep each level different and that ensures that there isn’t any monotony in the game.

In Angry Birds, advancement plays a huge role. Players are supposed to complete levels and move on to the next. Each level can be completed once the pigs are killed. Accomplishing each level gives a sense of satisfaction and achievement which I really enjoy. Also as we advance further in the game, new obstacles are unlocked. First we play only with wood ,then there is stone and so on. There are also new birds introduced as mentioned earlier. Another interesting factor is that as the levels go up, new and stronger pigs are introduced as well. For instance you can have pigs with helmets that require you to kill them twice before they die. Also with each level the difficulty increases making it more challenging and satisfying as you complete it. These factors make you want to complete levels and go ahead and see what lies ahead. For this reason I find advancement as a pleasure while playing this game.